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ABSTRACT

This is a report on the Stanford Bridge Project being conducted through the Maryland Community College Extension to examine policies impacting the high school to community college transition for students. The project analyzes admissions, placement and remediation, transfer, and other policies at two Maryland community colleges. The report shows that: (1) more than 55% of Maryland college students attend community colleges; however, graduation and transfer rates have declined continuously over the last decade; (2) Maryland community colleges still maintain open admissions and have financial aid awards designed specifically for community college students; however, the receipt of financial aid requires satisfactory academic performance, and aid cannot be given to students testing at low basic skill levels; (3) all community colleges in the state use the same math, reading, and English placement tests; (4) the Maryland public higher education system maintains a computerized information system on transfer articulation between state institutions; (5) most students do not enroll in community college directly after high school graduation; and (6) the high school exit criteria for math and English are not totally consistent with college entrance expectations. The report offers recommendations for improving student transition to college--for example, early intervention in high schools; increased funding for math, reading, and English programs; and more communication between the different educational levels on expectations. The Stanford Bridge Project is also being conducted in California and Oregon. (Contains 13 references.) (MKF)

**THE STANFORD BRIDGE PROJECT
MARYLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXTENSION**

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1

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THE STANFORD BRIDGE PROJECT
MARYLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXTENSION

ABSTRACT

The Maryland Community College Extension utilized documents, websites, staff interviews and student focus groups to examine the policy environment for high school to community college student transition in the state. By analyzing the admissions, placement and remediation, transfer, and other related policies and practices at two Maryland community colleges—in jurisdictions that represent the state's socioeconomic and racial/ethnic diversity—we discovered that the transition for students is less than seamless.

We found that high school exit criteria for math and writing are not consistent with college entrance expectations. Academic advising in high schools provides students, especially those with no parental advocate, insufficient counsel. Although the state provides for a transfer advisor at the community colleges, the transfer process can be complex and overwhelming for students using the community college as a step toward four-year degree completion. Although the previous phases of the Bridge Project found little evidence of state-level attempts at K-16 transition improvement between high schools and four-year schools, we found, however, that initiatives at these community college campuses illustrate headway in improving student transitions.

**THE STANFORD BRIDGE PROJECT
MARYLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXTENSION
(Draft – Not for citation)**

Introduction

This report summarizes findings from a Maryland case study of policies and practices affecting the transition of students from high school to community college. This study is one of three being conducted as an extension of the national five-year study, "The Bridge Project: Strengthening K-16 Transition Policies," a project that examines policies that affect students' high school to college transitions. The community college extension is being conducted in regions of California, Oregon, and Maryland and is being directed by the Stanford Institute on Higher Education Research with support from the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI). NCPI is sponsored in part by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI).

The Bridge Project consists of two major phases. Phase I seeks to understand policies and practices related to freshman admissions and initial course placement. It also examines secondary school curricula and testing requirements and analyzes the compatibility of content and assessment across the K-12 and higher education sectors. Phase II seeks to understand how these policies and practices are transmitted to, and understood by students, parents and school personnel, including teachers, counselors, and administrators.

This research, the Community College Extension of the Bridge Project, focuses on:

- the admissions and placement policies and practices for recent high school graduates who are attending community college;
- the transition environment for these students and whether there are observed disjunctures between high school and community college curriculum, skills assessments and course placement; and,
- the types of transition services and programs (high school to community college and to a lesser extent community college to four-year institution) available to students.

Understanding community colleges as a component of K-16 transitions is important for a number of reasons:

- Over 1,100 community colleges in the U.S. serve over 40% of the U.S. undergraduate enrollment. Almost half are first-time college students (AACC, 2002). In Maryland, over 55% of Maryland citizens attending college in the state attend community colleges (MACC, 2000).

- Completion rates of first-time degree-seeking students at community colleges are quite low. Even at a high performing Maryland community college, after six year, only 13% of these students had completed a degree and 26% had transferred to a four-year institution.
- There has been a ten-year downward trend in overall graduation and transfer rates of new community college students in Maryland (MHEC, 2000).
- The nation's community colleges provide most of the costly post-secondary academic remediation needed by students to complete a two or four-year degree.
- Community colleges have an extensive history of collaboration with high schools. Other higher education institutions may benefit from these types of partnerships.
- Community colleges play an increasing role in preparing teachers to meet the Maryland teacher shortage.
- In a time of economic downturn, more young people look to the community colleges for postsecondary education and training. An understanding of the role of these institutions in the preparation of young people for the job market can only benefit policy development.

As with the earlier phases of the project, an underlying assumption of this research is that a lack of consistency in curricular content and academic expectations between K-12 and higher education coupled with a lack of communication between these two sectors cause many problems in the high school to college transition (Maryland Phase II Report, 2001). These problems include decreased access to four-year colleges and universities, particularly for underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students; an unacceptably high need for remedial education in colleges and universities, the majority of which occurs at community colleges; and unnecessary costs and administrative burdens for higher education institutions.

The major finding from this study include the following:

- The community college staff members interviewed are concerned about how to deal with the large number of academically unprepared recent high school graduates attending the community colleges.
- Students assessed and placed into developmental courses are frustrated and angered at the experience.
- Teaching and learning varies by school even within jurisdictions.
- Algebra 1 is not adequate preparation for College Algebra. Statewide efforts are currently addressing the gap between high school math requirements and college-level expectations.
- Students labeled learning disabled or who attended lower performing high schools are often not expected to attend college.
- Parent advocacy is often key to a child's success in navigating the secondary to higher education divide.
- Community college students often wait too late during high school to apply to four-year schools, especially those without support (parent advocate) at home.
- General education credits earned at the community college are technically fully transferable but in reality the receiving institutions can exercise discretion in the courses they accept.
- Writing expectations in high school and college are not aligned.

The data collected in the earlier phases of the project support the assumption of a lack of coordination between secondary and higher education institutions. By examining high school to higher education policies among two of Maryland's most popular public universities, data from Phase I (Milton and Schmidlein, 2000) suggest the link between K-12 and higher education is fairly weak in the state. Likewise, Phase II findings (Mintrop, MacLellan, and Pitre, 2001) point to a low level of communication between higher education institutions and high school students, parents, and staff.

New educational reforms may in fact compound these problems because of the lack of coordination among the various levels of education (Kirst, 1998). According to Kirst (1998, p.1), "The bridge that once led students across the secondary-postsecondary divide has been weakened by conflicting concepts and opposing forces, and it is becoming increasingly unclear how many of the nation's students will be able to negotiate a successful path from high school to college." A greater understanding of the disjunctures between K-12 and higher education curricula content, testing practices, and student expectations could help provide a basis for lessening these disparities and, thereby, improving opportunities for all students to gain access to, and succeed in higher education (Kirst, 1997).

In this study we followed the design compiled for the national Bridge study at the Stanford Institute on Higher Education Research directed by Michael Kirst and Andrea Venezia. We want to acknowledge and thank them for designing the interview protocols that underlie our findings. After a brief introduction of the study's methods and sample, we present our findings of the admissions policies and placement procedures and student transition services available at the two institutions selected for the study. The information on the two community colleges was provided through documents, websites, and staff interviews. Student focus groups provide some understanding of student expectations of, and experiences with, the high school to community college transition. We conclude with a discussion of the policy relevance of our findings.

Research Methods

The study was conducted at Montgomery College, Rockville Campus and The Community College of Baltimore County, Catonsville Campus.¹ These two campuses are located in jurisdictions that

¹ The community college extension of the Bridge Project did not include time and funding for a pilot project that may have led to a tighter design.

reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the state. These are the same jurisdictions that the four high schools were selected in the previous phase of the project (Phase II).

The data collection for this study is qualitative. The two cases were written from information supplied through an analysis of college documents and interviews of key community college staff (e.g., research, advisement, admissions, financial aid staff, etc.).

The section on community college student transition experiences results from three student focus groups. The students of interest for the focus groups were students who entered community college directly from high school, were degree-seeking students, transfer students, and students enrolled in dual (or concurrent) enrollment courses. Students were recruited with the help of the student life directors on both campuses. All three of the focus groups were diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and gender. The students also differed in socioeconomic background and high school achievement levels.

It is important to note that the two community colleges selected for the study are large multi-campus institutions. Some of the data gathered was reported by the research offices and in the catalogues and student profiles as college-wide data, as these six campuses are considered two large institutions. The interviews, however, were conducted at only one campus of each college system. Therefore, the interview data includes perspectives on transition policymaking and services on those campuses only.

STATEWIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE POLICIES

The Maryland Code of Regulations, COMAR 13-B sets forth the regulations with which all colleges are expected to comply. There are 16 Maryland community colleges. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) is the regulatory agency and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) is the organization through which the colleges lobby for legislative action in the state.² The following sections of the report highlight Maryland statewide community college initiatives and policies. These help provide context for the current study.

² Phase 1 of the Bridge Project in Maryland described the organization of higher education, as well as the key actors and policymaking processes in the state. We ask that you refer to the Phase I Technical Report written by Toby Milton and Frank Schmidlein (2000) for this background information.

Maryland's K-16 Partnership for Teaching and Learning

Maryland's K-16 Partnership for Teaching and Learning has been working to improve the connections between K-12 and higher education since 1998. The K-16 Council includes leaders of the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), MHEC, and the University System of Maryland (USM) and corporate, civic, public, and private education representatives. The Partnership's goals include:

1. aligning MSDE performance-based standards and assessments for high school graduates with college admissions criteria;
2. developing performance-based outcomes for USM's writing program;
3. aligning mathematics expectations for placement in college-level math with high school performance-based outcomes.

To support the goals of the Partnership, a number of subcommittees were formed to address these and other issues. These subcommittees include:

- Standards, competencies, and assessments
- Professional development
- Community engagement
- Secondary to higher education transition mathematics
- Remedial education
- Partnership for teaching and America's Future (Maryland K-16 Website, 2001). (The goal of this subcommittee is increasing the numbers of qualified teachers statewide.)

Although higher education policymakers have been working toward improving the K-12 to higher education connections in the state, the earlier phases of the Bridge Project suggest that the Partnership initiatives have not trickled down to the school level.

Maryland Community College Admissions

Maryland's community colleges, not unlike community colleges nationally, follow open admissions. This means that students are not denied access to college courses and programs on the basis of standardized test scores or high school grades. Students under 16, as well as students without a high school credential, are eligible to enroll. The admissions policies at specific institutions may include criteria for growing populations in their jurisdictions, like home schooled children in Montgomery County.

Financial Aid

The largest amount of financial aid for students in public higher education institutions in the state is federal aid (see Phase 1 for a more complete explanation). There are also Maryland state scholarships available for specific programs and each institution provides foundation scholarships.

The receipt of financial aid requires satisfactory academic performance. However, placement into developmental education does not affect a student's financial aid package, although it will typically only cover one year of postsecondary developmental (remedial) education. Federal aid cannot not be given if a student tests at the elementary level or below (Interview, 7/20/01).

The Maryland HOPE Scholarship program is specifically designed for community college students, and those who plan to transfer to four-year schools, who major in academic programs that will address career shortage areas in the state (MHEC Website, 2001). Students can receive \$1,000 annually at a two-year college and \$3,000 annually at a four-year college. This scholarship application is sent to the State Scholarship Administration with an official high school transcript by March 1. The applications, like for other available state scholarships, are disseminated by high school guidance and career counselors, college financial aid offices, and the State Scholarship Administration (MHEC Website, 2001).

Qualifications for the Maryland Hope Scholarship include:

- 1) minimum 3.0 cumulative average in core academic courses in grades earned through senior year. The core academic courses are English, mathematics, social science, natural science, foreign language, and approved tech prep courses.
- 2) family income of \$80,000 or less
- 3) full-time enrollment in an eligible associate or bachelor's program
- 4) promissory note to work full-time in Maryland for each year of assistance.

K-12 Testing

"Maryland has had one of the longest running reform efforts in the nation, launching a statewide system of assessments more than 10 years ago. It has often been cited as a national model for systematic school improvement" (MSDE Press Release, January 9, 2002). Three tests important to note when considering high school preparation for college in Maryland include the Functional Test, the Maryland

Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP), and the high stakes high school assessment that is scheduled to go into full effect with the 9th grade class of 2003.

Functional Test

The functional tests examine basic competencies in reading, writing, citizenship, and math skills. Although included in the high school data files by MSDE, these data do not provide evidence of high school level or college-level skill competencies even though scores for the functional tests are reported during 9th and 11th grades. Typically more than 90 percent of high school students pass the functional tests (7th grade level skills).

MSPAP

MSPAP, implemented almost ten years ago, assesses students by evaluating their performance of tasks in place of standardized test questions. The difficulty of the testing program has led to controversy since its inception and there has recently been a drop in the reported scores. Montgomery County (one of the two jurisdictions used for this study and the state's largest school district with 130,000 students) was the first to take issue with the drop in school level scores in 2001. "State officials have suggested that the lack of test-score increases may be linked to the fact that schools across the state have more disadvantaged students and fewer experienced teachers" (Education Week, January, 2001). In addition, the concern over whether the alignment of MSPAP with student performance expectations in college continues to be in question among college staff and other policymakers.

High School Assessments

The Maryland High School Assessments are currently being developed to test a student's knowledge of the Core Learning Goals (in course content of four areas) and will be given as end-of-course exams in English I, government, algebra/data analysis, geometry, and biology. Students entering 9th grade in fall 2001 and 2002 are required to take the assessments; passing the assessments is not a graduation requirement. Maryland public school students entering 9th grade in fall 2003 are slated to be required to take and pass the Maryland High School Assessments as a requirement for graduation (MSDE Website, 2001). Of special concern is how these high stakes assessments may affect the futures of marginal students in need of developmental courses in math, English, and/or reading.

Placement and Remediation

The increase in postsecondary remedial need is a state and national issue. Students experience frustration when, after earning As and Bs in high school programs—often college preparatory programs—are assessed and placed into lower level courses by the colleges.

Less than a decade ago academic remediation at the community colleges in Maryland was not reported to MHEC and its provision was not a major focus of policymakers. As more recent high school students are coming to college unprepared, the provision of developmental courses in reading, writing, and math are fiscally becoming a larger part of the mission of the community colleges. This shift has led to scrutiny of high school curriculum and placement policies.

In 1997-1998 community colleges in Maryland standardized their testing and placement policies. Although four-year public institutions use a variety of placement tests, the community colleges in the state use the same test, The Accuplacer, and the same cut-off scores for placement into developmental courses in reading, English, and mathematics. For example, the score for the Accuplacer Reading Test is reported on a 120-point scale, with the following score ranges indicating placement (MC Website, 2002):

0-52 = Adult Basic Education

53-65 = College Reading Skills I or Basic Reading

66-78 = College Reading Skills II or College Reading

79+ = Exempt from remedial or developmental prerequisites

To enroll in courses that count toward a college degree or certificate a student must successfully complete Level 2 reading. There may be exceptions at institutions that offer some credit-bearing courses that do not require completion of developmental prerequisites.

Student Transfer Policies

A major premise of the Maryland public higher education system is that a student should be able to progress from one segment of higher education to another without loss of time or unnecessary duplication of effort. The objective of MHEC is to ensure that a student who intends to complete a bachelor's degree and begins his or her work at a community college is able to move toward the completion of that degree by transferring to a four-year degree granting institution without loss of credit or unnecessary

duplication of course content. MHEC also considers that some students change their educational objectives as they progress in their studies and that they should also be able to complete their general education courses and have them transfer without loss of credit.

MHEC recognizes that students select institutions of higher education for a variety of reasons. They also recognize that each Maryland public college or university has a separate and distinct mission, and that each has the responsibility to establish and maintain standards of expectations for courses, programs, certificates, and degrees consistent with that mission. Regardless, the state transfer policies are meant to ensure that effective and efficient transfer of credits occurs within the larger context of the state-wide structure of four-year and two-year college education.

The state transfer policies include a general education sequence that is considered equivalent at any Maryland higher education institution. In other words, 36 credits of general education from the community college will transfer as general education as determined by the receiving four-year institution. The lack of standardization exists in what the receiving institution define as equivalent coursework (Interview 6/20/01).

Associate's degrees are also considered fully transferable by the state guidelines.

The University System of Maryland (USM) maintains a computerized information system (ARTSYS) that provides students and advisors information about the transferability of credit from one institution to another in the state. ARTSYS is used at all Maryland public institutions and some independent colleges in the state (see *Student Guide to Transfer Among Maryland Colleges and Universities*). Each Maryland public institution of higher education also has a designated Transfer Coordinator to help students, faculty, and administrators interpret transfer policies.

As described in the Phase I report (Milton and Schmidlein, 2000), ARTSYS is a computerized data information system that informs students and advisors at a community college about the transferability of each community college course. It indicates whether the course is transferable and, if so, indicates the four-year institution's equivalent course number. It also indicates the general education area(s), at both the sending and receiving institution, applicable to the course.

The ARTSYS program permits the student to enter his or her transcript into ARTSYS to determine the transferability of a course. ARTSYS also allows the analysis of the courses taken against a

recommended transfer program. This may be done for a single program at a single institution or for multiple programs at several institutions. The ARTSYS program computes a transfer grade point average, a grade point average for a particular program, as well as an overall grade point average.

Articulation Agreements

To assist students in smooth transfer, many Maryland colleges and universities have developed articulation agreements. These agreements detail curricula and policies that permit students to undertake associate's degrees and complete bachelor's degrees at four-year institutions without loss of credit (MC Website, 2001).

Articulation agreements are also maintained between high schools and community colleges in the form of 2+2 programs. These programs allow a student to enter a two-year program, often Tech Prep, in high school that is coordinated with the two-year program at the community college.

Dual Parallel Enrollment

The state provides funds to discount tuition for students who enroll in college courses while still attending high school. Individual institutions develop their policy to distribute this support. Dual enrollment has become increasingly popular as a "head start" in completing postsecondary education and often a four-year degree (Interview, 6/14/01).

An example of dual enrollment is Tech Prep. Tech Prep was designed to help high school students focus on technical careers. These programs include 2+2 (two years of high school with a particular technical career focus coordinated with two years at the community college) and 2+2+2 agreements (completion of a degree at a four-year institution).

When interviewed (1/24/02), a former Maryland community college workforce initiatives director pointed out that dual enrollment in Maryland began with high school vocational students, similar to Tech Prep, but has evolved to focus more on the better prepared high school students seeking a bachelor's degree. These students take courses at the community college in order to earn college credit while in high school. Regardless of whether dually enrolled for four-year college preparation or technical career degree or

certificate completion, these programs are important because they serve as an early contact point between younger students and the institution.

Data Collection and Availability

The availability of data on Maryland community college students reflects federally and state reporting requirements. The data commonly reported include community college graduation, transfer, and retention, minority achievement, part-time grant information, merit scholarship data, and continuing education figures for programs that receive state and federal funding.

The Student Outcome and Achievement Report (SOAR) is of special interest when studying high school to college transitions. SOAR was commissioned by the Maryland General Assembly in 1999 to provide feedback to high schools on how well their graduates do in their first year of college. This data was intended to provide differences in academic preparation (% needing remediation in math, English, and or reading) among students graduating from high school who took college preparatory or "core" courses in high school versus students who did not ("non-core"). SOAR focuses on the numbers of students taking postsecondary remediation in the state, while highlighting the community colleges' role in providing this instruction. Although this information is available, there is a two year lag in its reporting which reduces its perceived value to many high schools for planning purposes.

There is a continuing ten-year downward trend in the overall graduation and transfer rate of new community college students in Maryland (MHEC, 2000). The retention, transfer, and graduation rates of Maryland community colleges are tracked two, three, and four years after matriculation and are reported by gender and ethnicity. MHEC (p. 1) notes that the community college rates are low, but this can be partially explained by the expansion of the community college mission to include goals other than earning a degree or transferring.

A recent focus of the K-16 Partnership has been to create a Maryland Center for Education Statistics that would serve as a warehouse for all of the data currently available. The Partnership shares this interest with the Teacher Quality Visionary Panel subgroup and the Achievement Initiative for Maryland's Minority Students (AIMMS). The MSDE superintendent has proposed a committee to discuss the possibility of creating the Center (Minutes of the K-16 Leadership Council, September 19, 2001).

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CASES

In our investigation, we wanted to know what policies and practices govern admissions, placement, dual enrollment, and data collection, and how these policies evolve. After a brief description of each institution, we discuss some of the implications of the staff interview data and policy analyses for student secondary to post-secondary transition. The student data provide some of the better evidence of the disconnects between high school and college that remain in the state systems.

Montgomery College, Rockville Campus Case

Institutional Background

Montgomery College (MC) is Maryland's oldest community college. The College was founded in 1946 and was originally the higher education division of Montgomery County Public Schools. Montgomery College achieved independent status in 1969. The College is chartered by the state of Maryland and is governed by a 10-member Board of Trustees. Campuses are located in Takoma Park, Rockville and Germantown (MC Website, 2001).

MC offers more than 130 degree and certificate programs for students who wish to pursue an associate's degree, transfer to a four-year college or university, enter the job market or upgrade career skills. In addition, more than 100 career and enrichment programs are offered through Workforce Development and Continuing Education (MC website, 2001).

MC-Rockville Campus has the highest credit student enrollment of the three campuses. For the Fall 2001 semester Rockville has 14,334 students enrolled. Most students (9 out of 10) live in Montgomery County and approximately 25% of Montgomery County high school graduates attend the college. Table 1 highlights the characteristics of these students.

Table 1 – Characteristics of Credit Students, Rockville Campus, Fall 2001

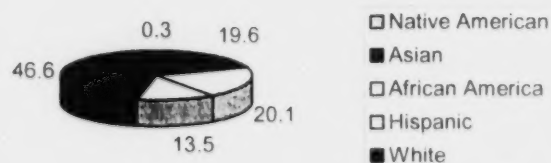
Characteristics	Fall 2001	
	Number of Students	Percent
Total Students	14,334	100
Full-time	4,531	32
Part-time	9,803	68
Gender		
Male	6,450	45
Female	7,884	55
Race Ethnicity		
African-American	3,078	21
Asian	2,714	19
Hispanic	2,070	14
Native American	10	0
White	6,461	45
Other Unknown	1	0
Age (Fall, 2000)		
15-17	400	3
18-20	4,512	33
21-24	3,031	22
25 and above	6,391	47
Straight from high school	2,649	18
Education Goal		
Transfer General Studies		40*
Degree or certificate	12,393	86
Previous College	1,947	9
Residence (Fall, 2000)		
In-County	12,415	92
Out-of-County	344	3
Out-of-State	814	6

*approximation from MC research office

The Rockville Campus in particular serves a vast international student community, an increasing population at community colleges nationwide (AACCC, 2001). During Fall 2000, international students comprised over 30% of the college-wide student enrollment to serve 4,364 international students representing over 170 countries (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

**Percent Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity
Rockville Campus Fall 2000**



The international student population was identified by Rockville staff members as the group most underserved by the current student transition services.

Student Outcomes Data

The MHEC reports the transfer and graduation rates for all of the 16 Maryland community colleges on their website (MHEC Website, 2001). MC-Rockville rates are similar to the statewide trends that have been downward for the past decade (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Montgomery College-Trends in Retention, Graduation, and Transfer Rates

Cohort	N	Two Years			Three Years			Four Years		
		Still Enrolled	Grad./ Did Not Transfer	Trans. To 4 Year	Still Enrolled	Grad./ Did Not Transfer	Trans. To 4 Year	Still Enrolled	Grad./ Did Not Transfer	Trans. To 4 Year
1989	2,354	35.2	0.7	18.6	19.1	2.8	26.9	12.3	4.0	31.0
1990	1,874	40.0	0.7	16.4	22.8	2.9	25.1	14.6	4.4	29.8
1991	2,258	39.7	1.1	14.9	23.1	3.7	22.9	13.6	5.6	27.2
1992	2,085	38.5	0.7	15.1	21.5	3.2	22.8	11.9	4.4	28.2
1993	2,072	38.1	1.1	13.6	21.5	3.7	21.2	12.1	5.2	25.3
1994	2,060	38.5	0.7	13.3	22.0	2.0	21.6	11.7	3.8	25.9
1995	2,355	38.2	0.9	14.3	21.5	2.9	22.7	12.8	4.6	27.5
1996	2,265	38.8	0.8	13.7	22.1	2.1	21.9	11.0	3.8	27.3
1997	2,447	36.7	0.9	13.7	20.6	2.4	22.0			
1998	2,597	35.5	0.8	12.8						

Source: MHEC Enrollment and Degree Information Systems

Montgomery, Rockville Case Summary

Montgomery County has an exceptional local funding base. One of the administrators interviewed, however, mentioned that the state must fund more positions for reading specialists at the high schools. All of the interviewees mentioned the need for improved services for the large international student population. All of those interviewed also commented on the increase in academically unprepared students enrolling immediately after graduation from MCPS, and that advising is a key issue for both high school students transferring to MC and students devising a plan to transfer to a four-year institution.

Although several of the administrators at the college mentioned that they were not aware of the formal K-16 activity on campus, MC has an extensive partnership with MCPS. The MC/MCPS partnership has its own web page and seasonal publication, *PrepTalk*, as well as a planned talk show for parents and students in high school to call in for information about college preparation, admissions policies and practices. *PrepTalk* is mailed to all MCPS 8th graders and includes information about college

preparation, placement testing, study skills, and time management. The materials from the partnership are intended to address the knowledge gap also identified in Phase 2 of the Bridge research.

The Community College of Baltimore County, Catonsville Campus

Institutional Background

The Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) is a tri-campus public college located in the suburbs of Baltimore, Maryland. CCBC was created in 1998 as a result of a state legislated restructuring that combined three independent community colleges into one institution. CCBC is one of the largest community colleges in the state of Maryland and the number one provider of undergraduate education and workforce training in the Baltimore metropolitan area (CCBC Website, 2002).

CCBC is a comprehensive community college which offers the Associate of Arts, Associate of Science and Associate of Applied Science degrees in 75 career and transfer programs. CCBC serves approximately 17,793 credit and 33,000 non-credit students annually by offering a broad array of transfer and career programs and services.

The Catonsville Campus of CCBC opened in 1957 as Catonsville Community College. The Catonsville Campus of CCBC is located on a 130-acre historic estate, which features Tudor buildings and an original estate mansion built in the 1800s. The campus is located within easy access of two major highways and a major international airport (CCBC Website, 2002).

Since the county's three autonomous community colleges began their merger in 1998, the policies and programs have evolved toward a united system. As the interviews conducted for this project reveal, the admissions and placement policies and procedures, as well as the student transition services available, are in flux. Not only is the state making policy changes to address K-16 issues, at the same time the three campuses continue to alter their individual policies to make them consistent college-wide.

The Catonsville Campus of CCBC has the highest credit student enrollment of its three campuses and the largest minority enrollment. Of the over 9,000 credit students enrolled during the Fall 2001 semester, 33% are African-American, 6% Asian, 2% Hispanic, 52% White, and 7% Other/Unknown. The complete table of credit student characteristics as reported by the CCBC Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, November, 2001) is included in Table 3.

Table 3 - Characteristics of Credit Students, Catonsville Campus, Fall 2001

Characteristics	Fall 2001	
	Number of Students	Percent
Total Students	9,193	
Full-time	2,876	31
Part-time	6,317	69
Gender		
Male	3,756	41
Female	5,437	59
Race Ethnicity		
African-America	2,992	33
Asian	531	6
Hispanic	193	2
Native American	31	0
White	4,798	52
Other/Unknown	648	7
Age Distribution		
15-19	2,507	27
20-29	3,494	38
30-39	1,621	18
40-59	1,200	13
60 and over	345	4
Other/Unknown	26	0
Program Area		
Transfer/General Studies	4,170	45
Occupational	3,952	43
Undeclared/Unknown	1,071	12
Status		
First-time	2,542	28
Previous College	6,651	72
Residence		
In-County	6,765	74
Out-of-County	2,129	23
Out-of-State	299	3

The CCBC Research Office supplies analyses of remedial need by race, not available at MC. Of special focus is African American student performance in the reporting of student remedial need and completion of developmental courses. A disproportionate number of African-American students place in

developmental courses. Twenty-four percent of the student population at CCBC is African-American. The Catonsville Campus has the highest percentage of African-American students at 33% almost twice the enrollment at the other two CCBC campuses. Approximately 47% of CCBC students who are African-American place in the first level of developmental writing and 38% place into the second level of developmental writing. Furthermore, the pass rates for these students are significantly below those of non-minority students. The same patterns are present for developmental reading and math. Therefore, at CCBC African-American students who place in developmental courses have a very high likelihood of never progressing past the developmental level and are at highest risk (CCBC Office of Institutional Research, 2000).

CCBC-Catonsville Case Summary

CCBC-Catonsville Campus interviewees focused on the lack of funding for program staff to directly work with students in transition. Baltimore County also has less affluent local funding than Montgomery County. For example, the Freshman Year Program that is intended to support students specifically through the first weeks at the community college (the most crucial weeks to student persistence) is well intentioned but understaffed to address even a fraction of the student issues that exist. Plans are currently underway to increase funding to adequately staff the Freshman Year Office (Interviews, 6/20/01).

Special outreach efforts focus on students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and minority students, in part a result of the increasing numbers of new students from lower performing city high schools. The Catonsville Campus full-time student population has included an increase in African American students with low transfer and graduation rates. Catonsville transition services specifically target these students.

An outreach program director describes the placement and remediation experience of students at the Catonsville Campus:

That's a big issue with a lot of incoming students, and that's why we have the developmental ed. faculty come and talk to them about those courses at the group orientation at the end of the summer. So many students come to this college with not a clue that they're under prepared. They get those test results, and they are sometimes very upset. I mean, just meeting new students here. Not SPARK students, but people coming back for an interpretation for their test results. I've had people walk out. You know, if I can't get credit, then I don't need to be here. So yeah, that's always an issue. It really is, and it's. I think in many ways it's a high school issue because they've got some very false expectations. I mean, we have people here who got Bs in English and test into

developmental English, and they think they know how to write and read, so it's a surprise. You know, basically, if they've graduated from high school, I think they have a reasonable to believe that they have passed the basic requirements (Interviews, 6/13/01).

The College is making strides to address the needs of these students. Recently acquired Title III funds will support early alert tracking of student engagement in developmental courses to address the low student completion rate in these courses. CCBC also provides four-year college matriculation programs where students lacking the four-year school admissions requirements are accepted to the four-year school with the provision of successfully completing 24 credits at the community college. These are examples of increasing student access to higher education.

STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF K-12/COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSITION

The following section summarizes three focus groups of recent high school graduates who attend the community college full-time. Several reasons why students attend community college emerged from these discussions. These include: educational goals reasons to attend the community college, sense of unpreparedness, and frustration with the advisement and course placement experiences.

We began the student discussions by inquiring about their educational goals and reasons for attending community college. Student goals include earning teaching credentials to medical school. All but one student indicated that they hope to transfer to a four-year institution. Students explain their intentions:

I mean a high school diploma today is pretty much worthless. You can't become an engineer, do a lot of the stuff you could do back in the old days. You've gotta get a higher education... (CC1-2).

Some students chose to attend community college because they felt they had no other option.

Some students felt as if they got 'stuck.' Reasons for feeling stuck included being put on a waiting list at a four-year institution, waiting too late to register at a four-year institution, and lack of financial resources to pay the tuition at a four-year institution.

I'm here because I got stuck here. I was supposed to, I got accepted to a four-year school. I was supposed to play lacrosse down there, but I didn't have money so basically I came here. I'm gonna stay here for probably another year and then I'm going to transfer (CC1-2).

Well, I was supposed to go to a four-year school, but I wasn't like ready for it... I got stuck here and it was too late. But hopefully, next summer, I'll be there, I mean next fall I'll be there and my plan is sports medicine (CC1-2).

The students in the focus groups attended different high schools. Although most of the students attended public schools, some attended private schools. They discussed their schools as "ghetto" versus "preppy" (CC2). The students explained that different schools had different expectations in terms of teaching and learning.

The thing is we all come from different high schools and different teachers teach different things in different ways, so just because we all went [to school] in Maryland, doesn't mean we all learn the same thing (CC2).

Among the focus group participants, many were disappointed with the preparation and lack of counsel they received from high school counselors concerning college (not unlike Phase 2 high school participants). The following student comments point to the inadequacy of high school counseling on college preparation and the importance of parental advocacy to student success in their transition to college. Students were aware that their high schools did not expect them to go to college:

They never, I mean they just [said] if you want to go to college, the forms are in there, do it yourself (CC1-2).

My high school was like that, too. They was like, well they probably thinking like nobody's going to college (CC1-2).

Students experienced frustration with college advising, either advisors provided too little or too much, but what students explained was that it was "the wrong type of attention" to their educational plans.

And then he's like oh well, you gotta go take the test. I was like, alright. So I took it and I went back, and they hadn't had the scores yet. It took me like four counselors and like at least like fifteen hours of sitting in that room to get like what classes I should take. And not even signing up for the classes, just them telling what classes I should take (CC2).

The student transition experiences described in the focus groups provide evidence that the high school to community college transition is frustrating for many students. However, many students regard community colleges as their only immediate higher education option. Economics and academic unpreparedness can be barriers to admission at four-year colleges and universities. Therefore, community colleges are playing an increasing role for first time college students.

SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE K-16 TRANSITION

Maryland's K-16 efforts are designed to support a unified system where the transition between high school and two-year and four-year institutions are as seamless as possible. The findings from

Maryland Bridge Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports, however, indicate that the K-16 activities in the state have been limited to higher level policy makers with few examples at the school staff, student, and parent levels.

Efforts are, however, underway in the state to address the disjunctures between secondary and post-secondary institutions. For example, in Spring 2000, the Maryland General Assembly created the Task Force to Study College Readiness for Disadvantaged and Capable Students. This task force is seeking to acquire funding for initiatives, such as high school reading instruction, to address the skills gap among students (Interviews, 7/18/01). A central finding of the group's final report is the following:

The connections between Maryland high schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions are not seamless. Maryland high schools need to work with higher education to determine the learning goals. Many students are not prepared for college level work because of the lack of alignment between high school and higher education standards (College Readiness Subcommittee, December, 2001).

In this study, the two community colleges that we presented are working to improve these types of connections. For example, both colleges are advancing early intervention strategies in the high schools, including placement testing and reading support. Additionally, developmental tasks forces at both colleges are exploring the misalignment in writing expectations between high school and college freshman work.

Efforts to improve the transition from high school to community college are also taking place statewide. For example, through a coordinated statewide approach that includes MSDE and community college faculty, the misalignment in math curricula is being improved with intermediate algebra content standards.

There still needs to be better coordination between community colleges and four-year schools. For example, although community colleges and four-year colleges and universities in the state have a common general education program, this program may not articulate well with the four-year major. Although there are common statewide policies, the transfer of credits can be confusing as four-year institutions want to maintain their autonomy in honoring credit earned at another school.

While the demographics of the CCBC-Catonsville and MC-Rockville recent high school graduate populations are diverse, evidence from interviews with college staff indicates that each college serves and reaches out to different student groups. The Catonsville Campus focuses on programs that target minority students, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, first time college students, and students graduating from low performing city schools. For example, many high school transition programs at

Catonsville, e.g., TRIO and Early Intervention, focus on minority students, more so than other student populations, in their efforts to provide individualized advising and academic support. The Dundalk High School – CCBC-Dundalk Campus Early Intervention Program is a good model, which provides intensive reading support for students who take the placement tests in the 10th grade. The goal of the Dundalk model is to have 80% of their seniors college-ready by graduation. Results of the intervention thus far indicate a large improvement in skill development among participating students. Catonsville also continues to develop the Freshman Year Program that incorporates intervention within the first few weeks of a student's first semester. These types of strategies can increase the persistence of students who may have experienced a difficult transition to college. Early Assessment Partnership and the MCPS/MC Partnership and initiatives, including the Montgomery College Remediation Program are lessening the skills gap between high school standards and college course expectations.

MC-Rockville offers programming to attract the higher performing high school graduates that is not currently available at CCBC-Catonsville. MC-Rockville Campus' Honors Program and travel abroad opportunities illustrate the availability of highly competitive coursework for four-year degree seekers who enroll at the community college prepared for college-level work. The MC-Scholars program was mentioned in all of the staff interviews as a highly selective program (1200 minimum SAT) unique to the community college venue.

The MC-Rockville Campus staff also stressed the importance of improving transition support for the large international student population at the campus. Although the Director of Advising points to an improvement in communicating to new students about the Michigan test used for ESL students, he and the other interviewees identify a remaining lack of support for these students.

The high school staff, teachers, and students in the Phase II study were not aware of the K-16 movement in place at the state-level. This study also found a lack of awareness of K-16 activity. This is expressed in the following quote from one of the community college administrators when asked about the effect of K-16 in the state:

I can't say that I've really seen any direct impact. I mean I'm familiar with the Two Plus Two Plus Two, with the Tech Prep, as I say, I think that moving more in partnership with the public schools is a good direction, but I couldn't, I don't think I can say anything about the effect of this (Interview, 11/13/01).

As the K-16 efforts begin to trickle down to the school level, the community colleges continue to serve as a gateway to opportunity for many marginal high school graduates. The role community colleges play in a student's transitional experience is precarious - not only must the college meet the developmental needs of many students, it must do so while maintaining the standards of transfer institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Expand early intervention in high schools. CCBC-Catonsville has succeeded at early assessment of student skills in high schools. More than assessment is needed. The Dundalk High School/CCBC-Dundalk program provides a model of successful high school/community college partnership and academic intervention. This intervention has resulted in fewer participating high school graduates requiring developmental courses when entering college. This intervention could serve as a model for other community college/high school partnerships in the state.

Pilot early tracking programs in community college developmental education courses. The Title III supported early tracking of student engagement in developmental courses at CCBC may be useful as a model for improving completion rates.

Increase funding for reading and writing intervention in the high schools. Interview data suggests that funding for reading specialists in Montgomery County is not adequate for the need among high school students. Baltimore County has also had no reading specialists or funding for these interventions. CCBC/BCPS was recently granted a small joint budget to begin this type of intervention next year.

Continue collaboration between two- and four- year colleges and universities and high schools toward curriculum alignment. Grassroots efforts among community college faculty, high school faculty, and four-year schools have made headway in the alignment of high school exit expectations and college-level requirements. These types of efforts need to continue, however, because the disconnects still exist. An example of a continuing disconnect is the high schools' focus on narrative writing and the community college expectations for expository writing skills (Interview, 7/10/01).

Place more emphasis on writing skills in high school. The writing training students receive in high school does not adequately prepare them for college. Therefore, community colleges have changed their requirements to serve these less prepared high school graduates. For example, the Catonsville English

department has reduced their writing requirements from eleven papers to six in the last decade due to the poor quality of freshman writing skills. This disconnect has led to the University System of Maryland schools requiring two semesters of community college English composition for their one semester English course.

Expand and improve the dissemination of information on college preparation in high schools. The MC/MCPS partnership publication *PrepTalk* that is mailed to all 8th graders in Montgomery County is a model for other schools. Colleges must continue to be creative in developing ways to communicate with K-12 students who often do not read existing correspondence.

Expand the Associate of Arts in Teaching Program. The recently approved Associate of Arts in Teaching (ATT) that is intended to address the teacher shortage within Maryland is a model that could be replicated in other states. However, this degree is for elementary education and does little to address the more immediate need for secondary school teachers (Interviews). The state should consider expanding this program, including improving the articulation between two- and four-year colleges, as a way to train and prepare secondary education teachers.

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APPENDIX A

Interviewees

Interviewees

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SPARK Program Director, CCBC-Catonsville
Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, CCBC
PEP Program Director, CCBC-Catonsville
Director of Admissions, CCBC-Catonsville
Mathematics Department Chair, CCBC-Catonsville
Transfer Advisor, CCBC-Catonsville
Coordinator of Freshman Year Program, CCBC-Catonsville
Director of Advising, MC-Rockville
Lead Recruiter, MC-Rockville
Director of Developmental Education, CCBC System
Director of Recruitment and Enrollment Management, MC-Rockville
Director of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, MC-Rockville
Director of Academic Initiatives, MC-Rockville
Director of Admissions, MC-Rockville
Director of Financial Aid, MC-Rockville
Dean of Mathematics, CCBC-Catonsville
Director of Student Life, MC-Rockville
Dean of Student Development, MC-Rockville
Director of Tech Prep, Baltimore County Consortium
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